

COMMISSION OFFICERS

Mary Lee A. Kieman, *Chair*
Catherine Emsky, *Vice Chair*
Lucia A. Aschettino, *Secretary*
Hilda C. Nieves, *Treasurer*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Carolyn M. Treiss

Connecticut General Assembly



PCSW

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

The State's leading force for women's equality

COMMISSIONERS

Maritza Bond
JoAnn Calnen
April Capone
Susan Eastwood
April Guilbault
Karen Jarmoc
Antonia Moran
Melanie O'Brien
Helene Shay
Susan Toliver
Patricia E.M. Whitcombe

HONORARY MEMBERS

Barbara DeBaptiste
Connie Dice
Patricia T. Hendel
Patricia Russo

**Testimony of
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Submitted to the
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 8, 2016**

Re: S.B. 393, AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC WORKERS

Senators Gomes and Hwang, Representatives Tercyak and Rutigliano, and distinguished members of the Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to voice the support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women for S.B. 393, An Act Concerning Domestic Workers.

The 40,000 Domestic Workers in Connecticut, who serve as nannies, caregivers and housekeepers, are predominately women.¹ This female-dominated workforce quietly props up our state economy, by caring for our children and elderly family members and by tending to household responsibilities for working families across Connecticut. But instead of being recognized for the important role they play in our economy, this workforce is exceptionally vulnerable to labor and employment abuses. Their unique employment situation, which requires domestic workers to sometimes live with their employers, compounded by the marginalization and discrimination that many domestic workers face – due to immigration status, race and ethnic background, or language barriers – create many risk factors for abuse. These risk factors are only amplified by the absence of statutory protection.

S.B. 393 will ensure that domestic workers in Connecticut are protected from labor and employment exploitation by affording them the same basic employment safeguards that most Connecticut workers already possess. This includes: overtime pay, explicit terms and conditions of employment provided at the outset of employment, and either a notice of termination or a modest severance pay.

S.B. 393 will also protect domestic workers from certain abuses—abuses that are intolerable in other employment domains—but which have become ubiquitous in their workplaces. This includes protection from: retaliation or discrimination after complaining or testifying about the employer, surreptitious monitoring with various electronic devices, privacy invasions of one's living quarters, and interference with private communications.

This proposal would also provide employees with an administrative forum in which to bring their grievances, as well as a private right of action. These provisions allow employees to meaningfully enforce the rights and protections laid out in the statute, without which the statute would be a hollow promise.

¹ <http://www.domesticworkers.org/connecticut-bill-of-rights>

Finally, S.B. 393 codifies domestic workers' right to be treated with basic dignity and afforded essential autonomy – in ways that are routine in typical employment relationships – but which have been legally denied to domestic workers for nearly a century. The history of domestic workers' exclusion from basic employment rights should provide the additional motivation to pass SB 393 to amend the shamefully racist and outdated legislation. Federal legislative compromise in the 1930's assured African American household workers – all of whom were women of color – would not be entitled to the labor and employment protections that were passed for so many other professions in the early 20th century.²

This proposal represents several years of thoughtful discussions among domestic workers and coalition members seeking to finally create labor protections for this very vulnerable group of workers. We urge this committee and the General Assembly to support this legislation which provides long-overdue labor protections for domestic workers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of this important bill, the impact of which would be profound for Connecticut's domestic workers and their families.

² Linda Burnham and Nik Theodore, *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work*, National Domestic Workers Alliance, 2012.